

OPENING SONGS

ACTS 2 VIDEO

WELCOME 19th May 2024 – PENTECOST SUNDAY '24 B

Galatians 5:16-26

Welcome! What a great morning to be together! Special Welcome to our guests & friends here for Ruth's Baptism! You have **Growing Praise** inserts **Bible Study Qs** in your worship orders to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & you can share that with someone else. **Zoom Bible Studies are Friday @ 1:00 p.m.**

(This week's Slide then video slide I sent) As we move into this week...We've just heard the Pentecost story...thunderous wind, tongues of fire, languages from around the globe...a commotion & cacophony that to many then & still in our world today is bizarre & otherworldly...and to speak of "Living by the Spirit" sets off images akin to an old Monty Python **sketch**... **(next 2 same slide)** They must be drunk or crazy or maybe both!

But Peter saw the reality: **"...what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel..."** Peter saw the decisive war has already been fought & won by the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Death & evil routed & abundant life ours in Christ alone. Now the church, enlivened & empowered by that same Spirit lives, proclaiming that truth as a vibrant compassionate hope-filled joyous fellowship that invites all people to become disciples of Jesus who grow in his grace & go in his power to show his love to the world. The Spirit brings the gospel to life in us right here right now so we can offer the life we have received in Christ to someone else.

*Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our **lives.***

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, we are an odd mob & for that we thank you.

Thank You for the widely different types of people, & expressions of faith, we represent as your church here in this room & in your world.

Thank you for those who express their faith in you through ancient creeds and dutiful living.

Thank you for others who faithfully follow Christ among innumerable questions & plaguing doubts.

Thank you for all whose faith is a profound, childlike simplicity, unhurried and unworried across generations.

Thank you for those who struggle to find the right word to describe You, yet whose faith is constantly expressed by wordless awe & kind service in response to Unfathomable Love.

God of all souls, continue to give us the grace to treasure each other with all our oddness & to use these differences as we minister to the diversity of people who share this city & our homes with us.

To your praise and glory in the name of Jesus. Amen!

FAITH CHAT:

1. How would you describe the work or the role of the Holy Spirit? "I don't know" is ok
2. When you hear "Living by the Spirit," what comes to mind? Why do you think that is?

PENTECOST SUNDAY '24 B – LIVING EXCLUSIVELY...BY THE SPIRIT

If you visited almost any major art gallery in almost any major city, you'd likely walk into a wing of that gallery displaying what could be called "Sacred Art." It would certainly have pieces similar to these. As you walked through that wing surrounded by images like those, you'd ponder in hushed reverent tones w/o any hesitation the beauty & sublime nature of those depictions of a singular brutal torturous criminal execution. You whisper in awe at the features of each piece removed at some emotional distance from the horror & grotesque nature of what you're seeing. We put crosses around our necks, on our wrists, rings on our fingers, in our worship area, homes...so on... fully unaware that the Roman Empire, the world's architect/exemplar of crucifixion...they were good at it & did it w/ great effect...would not even talk about crucifixion in polite company. Their philosophers/thinkers/teachers paled b/4 it; judging it a gruesome spectacle that dared only be used to keep slaves in their place & conquered enemies conquered.

For the 1st 4-500 yrs in the life of the church no Xn dared draw, paint or sketch what we take for granted. It was not art...w/in or w/o the church. With one exception... Archeologists have found 1 artistic rendering of the crucifixion dating @ 275-80 yrs AFTER Christ's death/rez. Scratched into the wall of what's either an army barracks or locker room of a men's gymnasium is a piece of "art" bearing the inscription "Alexamenos worships his god." One of Alexamenos' peers obviously knew he was a follower of Jesus & sketched a "tribute" to Alexamenos' faith/worship of the crucified Jesus...TO MOCK HIM. It's graffiti. It looks like this...scorn scratched in stone. Paul says "the message of the cross is foolishness." This artist certainly thought so. Notice Jesus wears a donkey's head. The message is clear, anyone who gets themselves crucified is an ass...& anyone who worships an ass is an idiot...to be mocked, scorned, cancelled...marginalized.

I said last week...maybe a few times b/4...this community called "church" is ALWAYS under the scrutiny of the world. The not-yet-Xn world is ALWAYS watching the church to see if this "life in Christ" business really makes a difference...to see if we're real & genuine in matching what we say & what we do...& assumes worst. Clearly someone was watching Alexamenos & thought he was nuts. But in a different part of the same building where the 3rd century Banksy graffitied his contempt for Alexamenos, there was another inscription carved in a different wall: "Alexamenos fidelis." Alexamenos is faithful. Whether as an encouragement to himself or in the eyes of another peer... Alexamenos demonstrates faith in the face of ridicule & derision. Alexamenos doesn't buckle under pressure from the world...and someone noticed

He lives what Paul writes, *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions & desires of their sinful nature to his cross & crucified them there.* And again...*Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.* We'll never know in this life what was happening among that group of young Roman men that drew eyes to Alexamenos' faith in Jesus & his life that reflected the life he'd been given by dying & rising w/ Christ in baptism. We have no idea. All we know is what we've known since Pentecost...

The only overwhelming & convincing evidence for Christianity is the presence of Christlike lives in our midst. This is the only kind of defense of the Gospel we find in the Scriptures.

It is the only defense that has ever been really effective in all of history.
— "The Churchman", New York: Volume XCIII, Number 11; March 17, 1906

I always find it fascinating that as big a deal as the Day Pentecost was for the early disciples...none of them ever talk about it again. Despite the parts of the church today that try to recreate that Pentecost moment...ecstasy of the Spirit...every time they gather, those who experienced the Holy Spirit then didn't dwell on it at all. Luke, who records this wind/fire/languages moment, never talks about Pentecost again...never Peter, whose sermon draws 3000 to the waters of baptism that day, never mentions his Pentecost experience ever again...Why? Because...

The point of Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit brings the work of Christ FOR them to life IN them...& becomes obvious to the watching world. *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear...But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control. There is no law against these things!* All those will simply be evident in you in seemingly inexhaustible supply...How? Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions & desires of their sinful nature to his cross & crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Whatever it was, the other guys could see Alexamenos' heart was not like theirs...it was like Jesus'.

The Spirit always & only ever points to Jesus...The Spirit always & only shapes our lives responsive to Jesus...conforms our character reflective of Jesus & leads us to trust that what Jesus has done in dying & rising is...FOR...US... FOR-EVER. The Spirit brings the gospel to life in us right here right now so we can offer the life we have received in Christ to someone else. John van de Laar, worship leader in Sth Africa writes, "The evidence of a Pentecost Church is not so much particular gifts or experiences, but the life, grace & service the Church brings to the world. We are filled with the Spirit not for our sakes, but for the sake of the world that God loves so dearly." The Spirit brings the gospel to life in us right here right now so we can offer the life we have received in Christ to someone else...so the Spirit can make its work visible in every part of our lives.

My favourite part of the Pentecost narrative from Acts is the moment when the crowds are bewildered about all the ruckus & rush to the disciples & say, "**We** all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!"

The Spirit comes so you & I can do just that: speak about what God has done – tell the great news of Jesus' life/death/res that gives us new life in a living hope where sin is forgiven, evil sent packing & death loses. We who live by the Holy Spirit & experience Jesus' love/life have abundant hope to share. Look...our business is not to have an answer for all the too-clever questions or a response for all the arguments that have no solution.

Our business is to say to the people around us, "Jesus unlocks the grave. He's done it for me. He'll do it for you." Our business is to say to folks we know, "Jesus came to take hold of/move into your life so you know you're never alone/never forgotten." Our business is to take our hands & serve/care for the needs of the people who cross our paths day in & day out in the Name of Jesus. The Spirit brings the gospel to life in us right here right now so we can offer the life we have received in Christ to someone else & so God's powerful love & immense compassion can be brought to bear in real human lives & real human circumstances.

Jesus kept his promise to send the Holy Spirit to take up residence ^{w/in} us so that he can shape/transform everything about us...so that the world can see him working through us...present in us powerfully in every moment of our lives so that we live propelled into each day by God's unshakable love & his power that rebuilds lives, strengthens families, transforms communities, & shapes nations & history itself...and so that somewhere along the way someone can say like they said almost 2000 years ago... "**ago**... " _____ *fidelis*" & it's your name/my name they use.

Whatever it is, they see that your heart is not like theirs...but like Jesus'.

TAKE IT HOME –

Where in your life this week, do you want people to see you as faithfully living by the Spirit?

Heart of Jesus in you - Specific places? Specific people? Specific circumstances?

Let's pray with that in mind... Father, you sent your Holy Spirit at Pentecost, filling the disciples with your resurrected life so they could boldly share the good news. Let the boldness of your Spirit transform us, the gentleness of your Spirit lead us, and the gifts of your Spirit equip us so that we too may powerfully & passionately proclaim Christ to the people of this city. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.